



# he Biggest Sunday School in China

And What the Picture  
Cards Did For It

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AT the time of the building of the first Methodist church in Peking friends of the missions remarked, "You must have large faith if you expect to fill so large a church in your day." Only a few years passed and a Sunday School of 400 filled every seat.

Every Sunday, workers whose hands were full of all sorts of work during the week united in the work of the Sunday School, and the Sunday School early became the chief joy of the mission.

At first the students from the mission schools and the Christians and servants of the mission were the only pupils, but after a while a few children of the neighborhood ventured in. The children had heard their elders call the missionaries "foreign devils," and they had been told that foreign devils used children's hearts and eyes to make medicines, so of course they were slow to venture within the courts of the foreigner.

A recruit from New England joined the mission, and she brought with her a talent for bringing things to pass and a quantity of picture cards. The cards were such as every

business house used to issue, combining an advertisement and a beautiful picture on each card. She took charge of the class of street children, and she gave to each child a card and promised to give a card to every little girl who should join her class in Sunday School. The cards proved very attractive; then, besides, other children could see for themselves that the first children to attend Sunday School had not lost their hearts or eyes.

They ventured in, in constantly increasing numbers, until at last the class was too large to meet with the rest of the Sunday School. It had to have a room all to itself. Then that room was soon filled to overflowing. The children sat on the seats and on the backs of the seats; they sat on each other's laps; they sat on the floor; they sat on the table and under the table. Indeed, the teacher had to take her place before the children should come in, and when they were all there she had just standing room and no more. And when visitors called the teacher could not move an inch to receive them and they could only look through the door, inside of which there was no room for them, and pass on exclaiming, "Wonderful! wonderful!"

Finally the mission determined to make a whole Sunday School of this one class, and it was done. In the morning was the regular Sunday School, with Christian members and students from the mission schools as pupils and the missionaries as teachers.

In the afternoon the children of the neighborhood and any adults who cared to come were the pupils in another Sunday School and

the pupils from the morning Sunday School were the teachers. The afternoon Sunday School became a training school, where the Christian students were brought into contact with those who knew not God and practiced the art of winning them for the Saviour already so dear to their own hearts.

Just here a trouble confronted the Sunday School—the supply of cards would soon be gone! A letter was sent to the *Woman's Missionary Friend*, asking that packages of cards be sent at once by mail, and that cards be collected and sent in boxes by freight later on. There was a grand response to this call from Maine to Maryland and from the Atlantic to far beyond the Mississippi, and the parcels came pouring in. A missionary received missionary mail in Tientsin and forwarded it to Peking. Ordinarily he hired one donkey for a courier who should make the trip, but when the cards began to come in he filled bags and bags with card parcels and two or three donkeys had to be hired to carry the mail to Peking. In the spring the boxes began to arrive, and before long there was a room in the mission packed from floor to ceiling with boxes, bags and barrels of cards. There were cards great and small; there were beautiful Christmas and Easter cards, fresh and new; there were rolls of large pictures and there were chromos.

The contents of the parcels and boxes were sorted, and the largest and best cards and pictures were kept for extra rewards and for Christmas presents.

Some of the card parcels were accompanied

by touching stories, as, for instance, one that came from Michigan. It was sent by a lady, who wrote that she was old and feeble, dependent upon friends and without money of her own, so that when she gave it must be because some one else first gave to her. She had read the call for cards with rejoicing, as if it were an answer given by God to her prayer that in her feeble, shut-in state He would show her how even she could do something for His cause.

She had not known that she had anything that she could give, but here was a parcel of beautiful picture cards that had been the delight of a child long since gone to heaven, and therefore very precious to the now aged mother. Thanking God that at last there was something she could give for His cause, she sent the parcel and accompanied it with her prayers.

Is it any wonder that small things like picture cards are made to accomplish such great things when such love and such faith send them on their way?

There were cards for all comers, and the Sunday School grew as the class before it had grown. It grew until it filled the church, as the class had filled its classroom—filled it until all the seats were crowded and the aisles, until the altar steps were taken and the platform inside the altar rail.

Then a second trouble threatened. The walls of the church had cracked and now they were bulging and it looked as if the heavy tiled roof might fall in some day, and then there would be no meeting-place. Besides,

how awful if it should fall while the house was full of children! This second trouble passed in as wonderful a way as did the first. Stays were put against the cracked walls and extra supports under the heavy roof. Then a letter was sent to the homeland, out of which



came all supplies and much good cheer. The letter was received by one whose great heart abounded in ways and means of winning men and the contents of their pocketbooks, and by return mail he forwarded the first installment of a sum sufficient to build a church large enough to accommodate the work, as all then

thought, for the next twenty years. With the money went also a letter full of cheer and inspiring energy.

In course of time the church was completed, and almost immediately it was filled by the still growing Sunday School.

By this time the Sunday School had such fame that it was visited by travelers as one of the sights of Peking, and workers of sister denominations seemed to take as much pride in the Sunday School and its beautiful house as if it were all their own; and all who visited the school said, "There is nothing else in China like it."

Through six days in seven, a sweet-toned bell in the midst of the mission tolled the hours. On the stroke of the bell families and schools assembled for prayers, school session opened and closed, classes passed and returned, chapel keepers opened their doors, dispensary work began, Bible readers started upon their rounds, preachers betook themselves to the preaching places and heathen neighbors, as far as the bell could be heard, counted the strokes when they wished to time any of their rather irregular doings. But there was one day in seven when the neighbors, recognizing the quick beat of the bell's continuous peal, said, "It is the foreigners' worship day," and for a mile away in some directions there was a hurrying among the children. Doors in the long gray walls that bound streets on both sides opened and children scurried through with faces set to answer the call of the bell, and children in the street ceased their play and chased off in the same direction. Children



from heathen families they were, but they were going to Sunday School!

Some pegged along on poor little bound feet, with the motions of those who walk on their heels, and in not a few cases these hurrying little figures bent under the burden of other children carried upon their backs—babies that they were set to care for—so to Sunday School they must be carried. There were children who ran right merrily on natural feet, for they belonged to Manchu families.

The Manchus rule China and make Chinese men wear the Manchu queue, to show that they are Manchu subjects, but the Manchus do not bind the feet of their girls, and it is said no bound feet are allowed in the palace.

If one were to follow a group of these hurrying children, his way would lie through dwelling streets, irregular and unclean under foot, and narrowed on either hand by walls as high as the eaves of the one-story houses within, and swept by dust and evil odors.

He might cross at least one of the wide thoroughfares that lie across the city between the southern gates and the gates in the north wall. Then, entering Filial Piety Lane, he would find an eager and growing crowd before the yet closed gates of the mission. When the looked-for moment arrived and the gates swung open he would see an excited throng, running and shouting, pour through the gates and into the doors of the capacious church, that stood wide open to welcome them. He would see the children, once inside, with an excitement that suggested flight from a fire rather than entrance into Sunday School,

crowding, hurrying and shouting, struggle each for his own place in his own class, with his own teacher. And there were days when he would have found assembled in this church, built to seat 1,200, not less than 1,400 children. When the seats were filled they sat on the pulpit platform, the platform of the altar and upon the floor in the corners.

During the lesson hour all over the great room there were groups with bended heads. In each group the teacher's head was the center around which the others closed in eager attention, for it was the policy of the Sunday School to reward attention to rather than recitation of the lesson.

And the reward? A picture card! Yes, even so small a thing as a picture card, blessed of God, may accomplish very great things. The cards are not sought altogether for their beauty. Some of the children who wait to receive them are thinly clad and no doubt hungry. To such the cards have commercial value.

A teacher crossing the street near the mission, soon after Sunday School was out, came upon a mite of a child not more than six years old standing beside a large soup kettle which a man, who carried the kettle and the fire to keep the contents warm suspended from one end of a pole and a little cupboard full of bowls from the other, had just deposited upon the ground. The child was just in the act of exchanging her card for a bowl of hot soup—possibly her first meal that day. On seeing the teacher she hid the card behind her until the teacher passed and then made the ex-

change. She could not know how the teacher rejoiced that the card could be put to such good use as to provide hot soup for a hungry little girl.

Singing was a great attraction in the Sunday School, as it seemed to be everywhere in China. The uninstructed native does not sing in tune or time, but he does not know it, so his joy in joining the chorus is without alloy.

However, children and some adults learn to sing in tune and their voices improve wonderfully under instruction.

The first class in singing in Peking began work in 1871. It took three months of daily practice for the class to learn to sing "There is a happy land," but on Christmas Day of 1899, at the last Christmas assembly before the terrors of 1900 began and the church and entire mission plant were destroyed, a chorus of one hundred Christian Chinese young men and young women rendered the Hallelujah Chorus from the "Messiah" so effectively as to thrill listening hearts and to bring tears to many eyes.

The singers in the chorus were the teachers from the great Sunday School. Every Sunday afternoon, scattered among the crowding pupils, they led the singing and, following their teachers, the pupils learned to sing the tunes, which they delighted to sing in their own courts and at play.

The time had been when members of the mission could not appear outside the mission walls anywhere in the neighborhood without being hailed by some child at safe distance,

“Foreign devil! foreign devil!” Now the Sunday School has done its work and the cry heard on every hand is, “Teacher, teacher, how many days to next Sunday?” And from over walls of the neighbors’ courts a passer in the street may hear childish voices singing “Jesus loves me,” “There is a land fairer than day” and other hymns learned in the Sunday School, where these children find the one warmest, brightest, most joyous hour of all the week.

